

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 SAA-01 SES-02
SSM-03 /079 W
-----116204 171010Z/11

O R 170729Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9262
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4753

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UN, MARR, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: REMARKS OF UNIFIL COMMANDER ERSKINE
AND UN AMBASSADOR TUEINI

1. SUMMARY. AT LUNCH ON AUGUST 16, UNIFIL COMMANDER ERSKINE SAID THAT ONLY ABOUT 150 LEBANESE SOLDIERS REMAINED AT KAWKABA, THE REST HAVING WITHDRAWN NORTH. HE SAW NO POINT IN MOVING LEBANESE SOLDIERS EITHER TO TIBNIN OR SRIFA AT THE PRESENT TIME. GHASSAN TUEINI, WHO JOINED DISCUSSION AFTER LUNCH, MADE CLEAR QUESTION WAS ACADEMIC AT MOMENT ANYWAY. GOL WAS GOING TO SIT TIGHT FOR NOW, LEAVING THE 150 SOLDIERS AT KAWKABA AND MAKING NO NEW DEPLOYMENTS, WHILE IT ATTEMPTED TO SEE IT SOME BROADER, MORE COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION COULD BE WORKED OUT. END SUMMARY.

2. AMBASSADOR, DCM AND EMBOFF LUNCHEON AUGUST 16 HERE WITH ERSKINE, AIME, AND LOCAL U.N. REP SAUNDERS. GHASSAN TUEINI
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JOINED DISCUSSION DURING COFFEE AFTERWARDS. ERSKINE, WHO HAD ATTENDED MEETING THAT MORNING WITH BOUTROS, KHOURY, TUEINI AND CUQ, SAID THE FOLLOWING.

3. COMMENTS OF ERSKINE.

A. ONLY ABOUT 150 LEBANESE SOLDIERS REMAINED IN

KAWKABA (SEE ALSO JERUSALEM 2264). THE REMAINING 450 HAD WITHDRAWN NORTH TO ABLAH AND RASHAYYA AL WADI ON AUGUST 12 AND 13. THIS REDEPLOYMENT HAD HELPED CALM CONSIDERABLY THE FEARS OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, THUS REDUCING THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WOULD SHELL KAWKABA AGAIN.

B. BEN GAL HAD TOLD ERSKINE THAT THE MILITIAS WERE LIKELY TO FIRE ON HELICOPTERS TRYING TO TRANSPORT LEBANESE TROOPS TO TIBNIN. MOREOVER, MILITIAS WERE LIKELY TO SHELL TIBNIN AFTER THE LEBANESE ARRIVED THERE. BEN GAL HAD INDICATED THAT RISKS IN PROCEEDING TO SARIFA WERE CONSIDERABLY LESS, ALTHOUGH ISRAELIS COULD MAKE NO GUARANTEES. ERSKINE BELIEVED HELICOPTERS COULD SAFELY TRANSPORT LEBANESE COMPANY TO SRIFA BY PICKING IT UP EITHER AT ABLAH OR RASHAYYA AL WADI, THEN FLYING OUT THE COAST, MOVING SOUTH OVER THE SEA AND THEN TURNING WEST DIRECTLY INTO SRIFA. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT SRIFA REMAINED WITHIN RANGE OF CHRISTIAN 155'S, WHICH COULD FIRE ABOUT 19,000 METERS.

C. GIVEN REDUCTION IN TENSION, HOWEVER, THERE WOULD NOT SEEM TO BE ANY NEED FOR THE LEBANESE TO DEPLOY EITHER TO SRIFA OR TO TIBNIN INSOFAR AS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF UNIFIL'S MISSION WAS CONCERNED. LEBANESE PRESENCE IN EITHER AREA WOULD NOT SERVE TO CARRY OUT 425'S INJUNCTION

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TO UNIFIL TO HELP LEBANESE RESTORE THEIR AUTHORITY IN THE AREA.

D. UNIFIL COULD HANDLE MECHANICS OF TRANSPORTING TROOPS BY HELICOPTER TO EITHER TIBNIN OR SRIFA. UNIFIL HAD FOUR HUEY'S AND TWO ALOUETTES. FOUR HUEY'S ALONE COULD TRANSPORT 24 PEOPLE PER LIFT AND THUS MAKE MOVEMENT IN FIVE LIFTS. REFUELING CAPABILITY WAS AVAILABLE AT NAQURAH.

E. ERSKINE COMPLAINED THAT LEBANESE HAD MISLED UNIFIL, EVEN WHEN UNIFIL WAS TRYING TO STAND UP FOR THEIR INTERESTS. UNIFIL HAD OBTAINED RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT DESPITE LEBANESE DENIALS TO CONTRARY, ORIGINAL BATTALION WAS ACTUALLY SUPPOSED TO SERVE AS FRAMEWORK FOR FULL BRIGADE, AND LEBANESE DID INTEND TO DROP OFF SOLDIERS IN MARJAYUN. (WE QUESTION THIS.)

F. THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF UNIFIL ESTABLISHING A SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER PRESENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES OR OF LEBANESE ARMY ENTERING ENCLAVES AS LONG AS THE SYRIAN ARMY REMAINED IN LEBANON. IF THE SYRIANS WITHDREW,

HOWEVER, ISRAELIS AND CHRISTIANS MIGHT ACQUIESCE IN SUCH
A PRESENCE.

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4. COMMENTS OF TUEINI.

A. GHASSAN TUEINI INDICATED QUESTION OF DEPLOYMENT
TO TIBNIN OR SRIFA WAS ACADEMIC. HE HAD JUST COME FROM
MEETING WITH SARKIS, WHO HAD DECIDED GOL SHOULD SIT TIGHT
FOR NOW--KEEPING THE PRESENT 150 SOLDIERS IN KAWKABA, BUT
MAKING NO FURTHER TROOPS MOVEMENTS.

B. DURING THIS TIME, TUEINI SAID, LEBANESE WOULD LOOK
FOR SOME WAY OF ARRIVING AT MORE COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION TO
PROBLEM. GOL WOULD MAKE THREE-PRONGED APPROACH IN THIS
REGARD: WITH UN IN NEW YORK, WITH UNIFIL AND WITH U.S.
LEBANON HAD, HOWEVER, NO PRESENT DESIRE TO CALL FOR SPECIAL
SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING AND EVEN HOPED TO AVOID DEBATE
DURING SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING FOR RENEWAL OF UNIFIL'S
MANDATE.

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C. TUEINI, IN TERMS SIMILAR TO ERSKINE, QUESTIONED WHETHER MOVEMENT TO TIBNIN OR SRIFA UNDER PRESENT RATHER HUMILIATING CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD SERVE ANY PURPOSE AND WHETHER IT WOULD HELP RESTORE LEBANESE AUTHORITY IN SOUTH LEBANON IT MIGHT HAVE SEVERE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS BOTH IN LEBANON AND WITH LEBANON'S ARAB FRIENDS. TUEINI SAID LEBANESE HAD BUTTED UP AGAINST FIRM ISRAELI DECISION NOT TO ALLOW LEBANESE OR U.N. INTO ENCLAVES. HE WARNED THAT UNLESS SOMEONE COULD "TALK SOME SENSE INTO THE ISRAELIS", LEBANON WAS GOING TO FACE GRAVE DOMESTIC CRISIS.

D. TUEINI ALSO SAID THAT GOL HAD MADE DECISION ON AUGUST 15 TO CUT OFF SALARIES OF HADDAD AND SHIADIC. AT MORNING MEETING CUQ HAD PRESENTED PROPOSITION THAT GOL SHOULD PAY HADDAD. TUEINI HAD TOLD CUQ THAT THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE, AND THAT UNIFIL SHOULD HAVE TOLD ISRAELIS SO.

E. TUEINI TOLD AMBASSADOR AFTER OTHERS HAD LEFT THAT CUQ AT MORNING MEETING HAD PROPOSED FERRRYING TROOPS TO NAQURAH BY HELICOPTER AND USING BUSSES FROM THERE TO SRIFA. AS NOTED ABOVE, HOWEVER, ERSKINE AT LUNCH SAID HELICOPTERS WOULD TRANSPORT TROOPS DIRECTLY TO SRIFA. (COMMENT. SUCH CHANGES MAKE LEBANESE VERY SCEPTICAL OF WHOLE ARRANGEMENT AND ARE ONE REASON THEY HAVE DECIDED TO SIT TIGHT.)
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, MILITARY PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT04753
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780336-0198
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780851/aaaabpyx.tel
Line Count: 200
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 6c037061-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1702558
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOUTH LEBANON: REMARKS OF UNIFIL COMMANDER ERSKINE AND UN AMBASSADOR TUEINI
TAGS: MARR, LE, IS, SY, UN, UNIFIL, (ERSKINE, EMMANUEL A), (TUEINI, GHASSAN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6c037061-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014